

DISCOURSE

O N

Antient and Modern
LEARNING.

(By the late Right Honourable

JOSEPH ADDISON, *Esq;*

Published from an Original MANUSCRIPT
of Mr. ADDISON's, prepared and
corrected by himself.



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ON

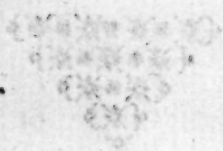
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THE present Age seems to have a very true Taste of polite Learning, and perhaps takes the Beauties of an antient Author, as much as 'tis possible *for it* at so great a Distance of Time. It may therefore be some Entertainment to us to consider what Pleasure the Contemporaries and Countrymen of our old Writers found in their Works, which we at present are not

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capable of; and whether at the same Time the Moderns mayn't have some Advantages peculiar to themselves, and discover several Graces that arise merely from the Antiquity of an Author.

AND here the first and most general Advantage, the Ancients had over us, was, that they knew all the secret History of a Composure: What was the Occasion of such a Discourse or Poem, whom such a Sentence aim'd at, what Person lay disguis'd in such a Character: For by this means they cou'd see their Author in a Variety of Lights, and receive several different Entertainments from the same Passage. We, on the contrary, can only please ourselves with the Wit or good Sense of a Writer, as it stands stripp'd of all those accidental Circumstances that at first help'd to set it off: We have him but in a single View, and only discover such essential standing Beauties as no Time or Years can possibly deface.

I DON'T question but *Homer*, who in the Diversity of his Characters has far excell'd all other Heroic Poets, had an Eye on some real Persons who were then living, in most of 'em. The Description of *Thersites* is so spiteful and particular, that I can't but think it one of his own, or his Country's Enemies in disguise; as on the contrary, his *Nestor* looks like the Figure of some antient and venerable Patriot: An effeminate Fop perhaps of those Times lyes hid in *Paris*, and a crafty Statesman in *Ulysses*: *Patroclus* may be a Compliment on a celebrated Friend, and *Agamemnon* the Description of a majestic Prince. *Ajax*, *Hector*, and *Achilles* are all of 'em valiant, but in so different a Manner, as perhaps has characterised the different Kinds of Heroism that *Homer* had observed in some of his great Contemporaries. Thus far we learn from the Poet's Life, that he endeavoured to gain Favour and Patronage by his Verse; and 'tis very probable he thought on this Method

of ingratiating himself with particular Persons, as he has made the Drift of the whole Poem a Compliment on his Country in general.

AND to shew us, that this is not a bare Conjecture only, we are told in the Account that is left us of *Homer*, that he inserted the very Names of some of his Cotemporaries. *Tychius* and *Mentor* in particular are very neatly celebrated in him. The first of these was an honest Cobler, who had been very kind and serviceable to the Poet, and is therefore advanc'd in his Poem, to be *Ajax's* Shield-maker. The other was a great Man in *Ithaca*, who for his Patronage and Wisdom has gained a very honourable Post in the *Odysses*, where he accompanies his great Countryman in his Travels, and gains such a Reputation for his Prudence, that *Minerva* took his shape upon her when she made herself visible. *Themius* was the Name of *Homer's* School-master, but the

Poet has certainly drawn his own Character under, when he sets him forth as a Favourite of *Apollo*, that was deprived of his Sight and used to sing the noble Exploits of the *Grecians*.

VIRGIL too may well be suppos'd to give several Hints in his Poem, which we are not able to take, and to have lain many bye Designs and Under-plots, which are too remote for us to look into distinctly at so great a Distance: But as for the Characters of such as lived in his own Time, I have not so much to say of him as of *Hommer*. He is indeed very barren in this Part of his Poem, and has but little varied the Manners of the principal Persons in it. His *Aeneas* is a compound of Valour and Piety, *Achates* calls himself his Friend, but takes no Occasion of shewing himself so; *Mnestheus*, *Sergestus*, *Gyas*, and *Cloanthus* are all of 'em Men of the same Stamp and Character.

-----*Fortemq; Gyan, fortemq; Cloanthum.*

BESIDES *Virgil* was so very nice and delicate a Writer, that probably he might not think his Compliment to *Augustus* so great, or so artfully concealed, if he had scattered his Praises more promiscuously, and made his Court to others in the same Poem. Had he entertained any such Design *Agrippa* must in justice have challenged the second Place, and if *Agrippa's* Representative had been admitted, *Aeneas* would have had very little to do; which would not have redounded much to the Honour of his Emperor. If therefore *Virgil* has shadowed any great Persons besides *Augustus* in his Characters, they are to be found only in the meaner Actors of his Poem, among the Disputers for a petty Victory in the fifth Book, and perhaps in some few other Places. I shall only mention *Iopas* the philosophical Musician at *Dido's* Banquet, where I can't but fancy some celebrated Master complimented, for methinks the Epithet *Crinitus* is so wholly foreign to the Pur-

pose, that it perfectly points at some particular Person; who perhaps (to pursue a wandering Guest) was one of the *Grecian* Performers, then at *Rome*, for besides that they were the best Musicians and Philosophers, the Termination of the Name belongs to their Language, and the Epithet is the same [*Καρχεδονιος*] that *Homer* gives to his Countrymen in general.

Now that we may have a right Notion of the Pleasure we have lost on this Account, let us only consider the different Entertainment we of the present Age meet with, in *Mr. Dryden's Absalom and Achitophel*, from what an *English* Reader will find a Hundred Years hence, when the Figures of the Persons concerned are not so lively and fresh in the Minds of Posterity. Nothing can be more delightful than to see two Characters facing each other all along, and running parallel through the whole Piece, to compare Feature with Feature, to find out the

nice Resemblance in every Touch, and to see where the Copy fails, and where it comes up to the Original. The Reader can't but be pleas'd to have an Acquaintance thus rising by degrees in his Imagination, for whilst the Mind is busy in applying every Particular, and adjusting the several Parts of the Description, it is not a little delighted with its Discoveries, and feels something like the Satisfaction of an Author from its own Composition.

WHAT is here said of *Homer* and *Virgil* holds very strong in the antient Satirists and Authors of Dialogues, but especially of *Comedies*. What could we have made of *Aristophanes's* *Clouds*, had he not told us on whom the Ridicule turn'd; and we have good Reason to believe we should have relish'd it more than we do, had we known the Design of each Character, and the secret Intimations in every Line. Histories themselves often come down to us defective

on this Account, where the Writers are not full enough to give us a perfect Notion of Occurrences, for the Tradition, which at first was a Comment on the Story, is now quite lost, and the Writing only preserved for the Information of Posterity.

I MIGHT be very tedious on this Head, but I shall only mention another Author, who, I believe, received no small Advantage from this Consideration, and that is *Theophrastus*, who probably has shewn us several of his Cotemporaries, in the Representation of his Passions and Vices; for we may observe in most of his Characters something foreign to his Subject, and some other Folly or Infirmary mixing itself with the principal Argument of his Discourse. His Eye seems to have been so attentively fixed on the Person in whom the Vanity reigned, that other Circumstances of his Behaviour, besides those he was to describe, insinuated themselves unawares, and crept

insensibly into the Character. It was hard for him to extract a single Folly out of the whole Mass, without leaving a little Mixture in the Separation: So that his particular Vice appears something discoloured in the Description, and his Discourse, like a Glass set to catch the Image of any single Object, gives us a lively Resemblance of what we look for; but at the same Time returns a little shadowy Landskip of the Parts that lye about it.

AND, as the Ancients enjoyed no small Privilege above us, in knowing the Persons hinted at in several of their Authors; so they received a great Advantage, in seeing often the Pictures and Images that are frequently described in many of their Poets. When *Phidias* had carved out his *Jupiter*, and the Spectators stood astonish'd at so awful and majestick a Figure, he surprized them more, by telling them it was a Copy: And, to make his Words true, shewed them the Original, in that magnificent Descripti-

on of *Jupiter*, towards the latter End of the first *Iliad*. The comparing both together probably discover'd secret Graces in each of 'em, and gave new Beauty to their Performances: Thus in *Virgil's* first *Æneid*, where we see the Representation of Rage bound up, and chain'd in the Temple of *Janus*:

-----*Furor impius intus*

*Sæva sedens super arma, et centum vinctus
aenis*

Post tergum nodis, fremit horridus ore cruento.

THOUGH we are much pleased with so wonderful a Description, how must the Pleasure double on those who cou'd compare the Poet and the Statuary together, and see which had put most Horror and Distraction in his Figure. But we, who live in these lower Ages of the World, are such entire Strangers to this Kind of Diversion, that we often mistake the Descripti-

on of a Picture for an Allegory, and don't so much as know when it is hinted at. *Juvenal* tells us a Flatterer will not stick to compare a weak Pair of Shoulders to *Hercules*, when he lifts *Antæus* from the Earth. Now what a forc'd, unnatural Similitude does this seem, amidst the deep Silence of Scholiasts and Commentators? But how full of Life and Humour, if we may suppose it alluded to some remarkable Statue of these two Champions, that perhaps stood in a public Place of the City? There is now in *Rome* a very antient Statue entangled in a Couple of Marble Serpents, and so exactly cut in *Laocoon's* Posture and Circumstances, that we may be sure *Virgil* drew after the Statuary, or the Statuary after *Virgil*: And if the Poet was the Copyer, we may be sure it was no small Pleasure to a *Roman*, that could see so celebrated an Image outdone in the Description.

I MIGHT here expatiate largely on seve-

ral Customs that are now forgotten, though often intimated by antient authors; and particularly on many Expressions of their cotemporary Poets, which they had an Eye upon in their Reflections, tho' we at present know nothing of the Business. Thus *Ovid* begins the second Book of his Elegies, with these two Lines:

*Hæc quoque scribebam Pelignis natas aquosis,
Ille ego nequitia Naso poeta meæ.*

How far these may prove the four Verses prefix'd to *Virgil's Æneid* genuine, I shall not pretend to determine: But I dare say *Ovid* in this Place hints at 'em if they are so, and I believe every Reader will agree that the Humour of these Lines wou'd be very much heightened by such an Allusion, if we suppose a Love Adventure ushered in with an *Ille Ego*, and taking its Rise from something like a Preface to the *Æneid*. Guesses might be numberless on this Occa-

sion, and though sometimes they may be grounded falsely, yet they often give a new Pleasure to the Reader, and throw in abundance of Light on the more intricate and obscure Passages of an antient Author.

BUT there is nothing we want more Direction in at present than the Writings of such antient Authors as abound with Humour, especially where the Humour runs in a Kind of Cant and a particular Set of Phrases. We may indeed in many Places, by the Help of a good Scholiast, and Skill in the Customs and Language of a Country, know that such Phrases are humorous, and such a Metaphor drawn from a ridiculous Custom; but at the same Time the Ridicule flags, and the Mirth languishes to a Modern Reader, who is not so conversant and familiar with the Words and Ideas that lye before him; so that the Spirit of the Jest is quite pall'd and deaden'd, and the Briskness of an Expression lost to an Ear

that is so little accustomed to it. This Want of discerning between the comical and serious Stile of the Ancients, has run our modern Editors and Commentators into a senseless Affectation of *Terence's* and *Plautus's* Phrases, when they desire to appear pure and classical in their Language : So that you often see the grave Pedant making a Buffoon of himself, where he least designs it, and running into light and trifling Phrases, where he would fain appear solemn and judicious.

ANOTHER great Pleasure the Ancients had beyond us, if we consider 'em as the Poet's Countrymen, was, that they lived as it were on the Spot, and within the Verge of the Poem ; their Habitations lay among the Scenes of the *Aeneid* ; they cou'd find out their own Country in *Homer*, and had every Day perhaps in their Sight the Mountain or Field where such an Adventure happen'd, or such a Battle was fought.

Many of 'em had often walk'd on the Banks of *Helicon*, or the Sides of *Parnassus*, and knew all the private Haunts and Retirements of the Muses: So that they liv'd as it were on *Fairy Ground*, and convers'd in an enchanted Region, where every Thing they look'd upon appear'd romantick, and gave a thousand pleasing Hints to their Imaginations. To consider *Virgil* only in this Respect: How must a *Roman* have been pleas'd that was well acquainted with the Capes and Promontories, to see the Original of their Names, as they stand derived from *Misenus*, *Palinurus* and *Cajeta*? That cou'd follow the Poet's Motions, and attend his Hero in all his Marches from Place to Place? That was very well acquainted with the Lake *Amsanctus*, where the Fury sunk, and cou'd lead you to the Mouth of the Cave where *Aeneas* took his Descent for Hell? Their being conversant with the Place where the Poem was transacted, gave 'em a greater Relish than we can have at

present of several Parts of it; as it affected their Imaginations more strongly, and diffused through the whole Narration a greater Air of Truth. The Places stood as so many Marks and Testimonies to the Veracity of the Story that was told of 'em, and helped the Reader to impose upon himself in the Credibility of the Relation. To consider only that Passage in the 8th *Æneid*, where the Poet brings his Hero acquainted with *Evander*, and gives him a Prospect of that Circuit of Ground, which was afterwards cover'd with the Metropolis of the World. The Story of *Cacus*, which he there gives us at large, was probably rais'd on some old confus'd Tradition of the Place, and if so, was doubly entertaining to a *Roman*, when he saw it worked up into so noble a Piece of Poetry, as it wou'd have pleas'd an *Englishman*, to have seen in Prince *Arthur* any of the old Traditions of *Guy* varied and beautified in an Episode, had the Chronology suffered the Author to

have led his Hero into *Warwickshire* on that Occasion. The Map of the Place, which was afterwards the Seat of *Rome*, must have been wonderfully pleasing to one that lived upon it afterwards, and saw all the Alterations that happened in such a Compass of Ground: Two Passages in it are inimitably fine, which I shall here transcribe, and leave the Reader to judge what Impressions they made on the Imagination of a *Roman*, who had every Day before his Eyes the *Capital* and the *Forum*.

*Hinc ad Tarpeiam Julem et Capitolia ducit
Aurea nunc, olim silvestribus horrida dumis
Jam tum Religio pavidos tettebat agrestes
Dira loci, jam tum silvam saxumq; tremebant
Hoc nemus, hunc, inquit, fronsoso vertice
collem,
Quis Deus, incertum est, habitat Deus. Ar-
cades ipsum
Credunt se vidisse Jovem: Cum sepe nigrantem
Ægida concuteret dextrâ, nimbosq; cieret.*

And afterwards----*ad tellæ subibant
 Pauperis Evandri, passimq; armenta videbant
 Romanoq; foro et lautis mugire carinis.*

THERE is another engaging Circumstance that made *Virgil* and *Homer* more particularly charming to their own Countrymen, than they can possibly appear to any of the Moderns; and this they took hold of by choosing their Heroes out of their own Nation: For, by this Means, they have humour'd and delighted the Vanity of a *Grecian* or *Roman* Reader, they have powerfully engaged him on the Hero's Side, and made him, as it were, a Party in every Action; so that the Narration renders him more intent, the happy Events raise a greater Pleasure in him, the passionate Part more moves him, and in a Word, the whole Poem comes more home, and touches him more nearly, than it would have done, had the Scene lain in another Country, and a Foreigner been the Subject of it. No doubt but the Inha-

bitants of *Ithaca* preferr'd the *Odyssees* to the *Iliad*, as the *Myrmidons*, on the contrary, were not a little proud of their *Achilles*. The Men of *Pylus* probably could repeat Word for Word the wise Sentences of *Nestor*; and we may well suppose *Agamemnon's* Countrymen often pleas'd themselves with their Prince's Superiority in the *Greek Confederacy*. I believe therefore, no *Englishman*, reads *Homer*, or *Virgil*, with such an inward Triumph of Thought, and such a Passion of Glory, as those who saw in them the Exploits of their own Countrymen or Ancestors. And here by the Way, our *Milton* has been more universally engaging in the Choice of his Persons, than any other Poet can possibly be. He has oblig'd all Mankind, and related the whole Species to the two chief Actors in his Poem. Nay, what is infinitely more considerable, we behold in him, not only our Ancestors, but our Representatives. We are really engaged in their Adventures, and have a per-

sonal Interest in their good or ill Success. We are not only their Offspring, but Sharers in their Fortunes; and no less than our own eternal Happiness, or Misery, depends on their single Conduct: So that ev'ry Reader will here find himself concerned, and have all his Attention and Solitude raised, in every Turn and Circumstance of the whole Poem.

IF the Ancients took a greater Pleasure in the Reading of their Poets than the Moderns can, their Pleasure still rose higher in the Perusal of their Orators; tho' this I must confess proceeded not so much from their Precedence to us in respect of Time, as Judgment. Every City among them swarm'd with Rhetoricians, and every *Senate-house* was almost filled with Orators; so that they were perfectly well vers'd in all the Rules of Rhetorick, and perhaps knew several Secrets in the Art that let 'em into such Beauties of *Demosthenes*, or *Cicero*,

as are not yet discovered by a modern Reader. And this I take to have been the chief Reason of that wonderful Efficacy we find ascrib'd to the antient Oratory, from what we meet with in the present; for, in all Arts, every Man is most mov'd with the Perfection of 'em, as he understands 'em best. Now the Rulers of *Greece* and *Rome* had generally so well accomplish'd themselves in the politer Parts of Learning, that they had a high Relish of a noble Expression, were transported with a well turn'd Period, and not a little pleas'd to see a Reason urg'd in its full force. They knew how proper such a Passage was to affect the Mind, and by admiring it, insensibly begot in themselves such a Motion as the Orator desir'd. The Passion arose in 'em unawares, from their considering the aptness of such Words to raise it. Accordingly, we find the Force of *Tully's* Eloquence shew'd itself most on *Cesar*, who probably understood it best; and *Cicero* himself was

so affected with *Demosthenes*, that 'tis no Wonder when he was ask'd, which he thought the best of his Orations, he shou'd reply, *The Longest*. But now the Generality of Mankind are so wholly ignorant of the Charms of Oratory, that *Tully* himself, who guided the Lords of the whole Earth at his Pleasure, were he now living, and a Speaker in a modern Assembly, wou'd not, with all that divine Pomp and Heat of Eloquence, be able to gain over one Man to his Party. The Vulgar indeed of every Age are equally mov'd by false Strains of Rhetorick, but they are not the Persons I am here concern'd to account for.

THE last Circumstance I shall mention, which gave the Ancients a greater Pleasure in the Reading of their own Authors than we are capable of, is that Knowledge they had of the Sound and Harmony of their Language, which the Moderns have at present a very imperfect Notion of. We find,

ev'n in Music, that different Nations have different Tastes of it, and those who most agree have some particular Manner and Graces proper to themselves, that are not so agreeable to a Foreigner : Whether or no it be that, as the Temper of the Climates varies, it causes an Alteration in the animal Spirits, and the Organs of Hearing ; or as such Passions reign most in such a Country, so the Sounds are most pleasing that most affect those Passions ; or that the Sounds, which the Ear has been most accustomed to, insensibly conform the secret Texture of it to themselves, and wear in it such Passages as are best fitted for their own Reception ; or in the last Place that our national Prejudice, and Narrowness of Mind, makes every thing appear odd to us that is new and uncommon : Whether any one, or all of these Reasons may be looked upon as the Cause, we find by certain Experience, that what is tuneful in one Country, is harsh and ungrateful in another. And if this

Consideration holds in musical Sounds, it does much more in those that are articulate, because there is a greater Variety of Syllables than of Notes, and the Ear is more accustom'd to Speech than Songs. But had we never so good an Ear, we have still a fault'ring Tongue, and a Kind of Impediment in our Speech. Our Pronunciation is without doubt very widely different from that of the *Greeks* and *Romans*; and our Voices, in respect of theirs, are so out of Tune, that, shou'd an Ancient hear us, he wou'd think we were reading in another Tongue, and scarce be able to know his own Composure, by our Repetition of it. We may be sure, therefore, whatever imaginary Notions we may frame to ourselves, of the Harmony of an Author, they are very different from the Ideas which the Author himself had of his own Performance.

Thus we see how Time has quite worn out, or decay'd several Beauties of our an-

tient Authors; but to make a little Amends
 for the Graces they have lost, there are
 some few others which they have gather'd
 from their great Age and Antiquity in the
 World. And here we may first observe,
 how very few Passages in their Stile appear
 flat and low to a modern Reader, or carry
 in 'em a mean and vulgar Air of Expressi-
 on; which certainly arises, in a great Mea-
 sure, from the Death and Disuse of the
 Languages in which the Ancients compil'd
 their Works. Most of the Forms of Speech,
 made use of in common Conversation, are
 apt to sink the Dignity of a serious Stile,
 and to take off from the Solemnity of the
 Composition that admits them; nay, those
 very Phrases, that are in themselves highly
 proper and significant, and were at first per-
 haps study'd and elaborate Expressions, make
 but a poor Figure in Writing, after they
 are once adopted into common Discourse,
 and sound over familiar to an Ear that is
 every where accustomed to them. They

are too much dishonour'd by common Use, and contract a Meanness, by passing so frequently through the Mouths of the Vulgar. For this Reason, we often meet with something of a Baseness in the Stiles of our best *English* Authors, which we can't be so sensible of in the *Latin* and *Greek* Writers; because their Language is dead, and no more us'd in our familiar Conversations; so that they have now laid aside all their natural Homeliness and Simplicity, and appear to us in the Splendor and Formality of Strangers. We are not intimately enough acquainted with them, and never met with their Expressions but in Print, and that too on a serious Occasion; and therefore find nothing of that Levity or Meanness in the Ideas they give us, as they might convey into their Minds, who used 'em as their Mother-Tongue. To consider the *Latin* Poets in this Light, *Ovid*, in his *Metamorphosis*, and *Lucan*, in several Parts of him, are not a little beholden to Antiquity, for the

Privilege I have here mentioned, who wou'd appear but very plain Men without it; as we may the better find, if we take 'em out of their Numbers, and see how naturally they fall into low Prose. *Claudian* and *Statius*, on the Contrary, whilst they endeavour too much to deviate from common and vulgar Phrases, clog their Verse with unnecessary Epithets, and swell their Stile with forced unnatural Expressions, 'till they have blown it up into Bombast; so that their Sense has much ado to struggle thro' their Words. *Virgil* and *Horace*, in his Odes, have run between these two Extremes, and made their Expressions very sublime, but at the same time very natural. This Consideration, therefore, least affects them, for, tho' you take their Verse to Pieces, and dispose of their Words as you please, you still find such glorious Metaphors, Figures, and Epithets, as give it too great a Majesty for Prose, and look something like the Ruin of a noble Pile, where you see broken Pillars,

scatter'd Obelisks, maim'd Statues, and a Magnificence in Confusion.

AND as we are not much offended with the low Idiotisms of a dead Language, so neither are we very sensible of any familiar Words that are used in it; as we may more particularly observe in the Names of Persons and Places. We find in our *English* Writers, how much the proper Name of one of our own Countrymen pulls down the Language that surrounds it, and familiariseth a whole Sentence. For our Ears are so often used to it, that we find something vulgar and common in the Sound and Cant; but fancy the Pomp and Solemnity of Stile too much humbled and depress'd by it. For this Reason, the Authors of Poems and Romances, who are not tied up to any particular Set of proper Names, take the Liberty of inventing new ones, or at least of chusing such as are not used in their own Country; and, by this Means, not a little maintain the

Grandeur and Majesty of their Language. Now the proper Names of a *Latin* or *Greek* Author have the same Effect upon us as those of a Romance, because we meet with 'em no where else but in Books. *Cato*, *Pompey*, and *Marcelles* sound as great in our Ears, who have none of their Families among us, as *Agamemnon*, *Hector*, and *Achilles*; and therefore, tho' they might flatten an Oration of *Tully* to a *Roman* Reader, they have no such Effect upon an *English* one. What I have here said, may perhaps give us the Reason why *Virgil*, when he mentions the Ancestors of three noble *Roman* Families, turns *Sergius*, *Memmius*, and *Cluentius*, which might have degraded his Verse too much, into *Sergestes*, *Mnestheus*, and *Cloanthus*, though the three first wou'd have been as high and sonorous to us as the other.

BUT though the Poets could make thus free with the proper Names of Persons,

and in that respect enjoy'd a Privilege beyond the Prose Writers ; they lay both under an equal Obligation, as to the Names of Places : For there is no poetical Geography, Rivers are the same in Prose and Verse ; and the Towns and Countries of a Romance differ nothing from those of a true History. How oddly therefore must the Name of a paultry Village sound to those who were well acquainted with the Meanness of the Place ; and yet how many such Names are to be met with in the Catalogues of *Homer* and *Virgil* ? Many of their Words must therefore very much shock the Ear of a *Roman* or *Greek*, especially whilst the Poem was new ; and appear as meanly to their own Countrymen, as the Duke of *Buckingham's Putney Pikes* and *Chelsea Curiafeers* do to an *Englishman*. But these their Catalogues have no such disadvantageous Sounds in 'em to the Ear of a Modern, who scarce ever hears of the Names out of the Poet, or knows any thing of the Places that be-

long to them. *London* may sound as well to a Foreigner, as *Troy* or *Rome*; and *Islington* perhaps better than *London* to them who have no distinct Ideas arising from the Names. I have here only mention'd the Names of Men and Places; but we may easily carry the Observation further, to those of several Plants, Animals, &c. Thus, where *Virgil* compares the Flight of *Mercury* to that of a *Water-Fowl*, *Servius* tells us, that he purposely omitted the Word *Mergus*, that he might not debase his Style with it; which, tho' it might have offended the Niceness of a *Roman* Ear, wou'd have sounded more tolerable in ours. *Scaliger*, indeed, ridicules the old Scholiast for his Note; because, as he observes, the Word *Mergus* is used by the same Poet in his *Georgics*. But the Critic shou'd have consider'd that, in the *Georgics*, *Virgil* studied Description more than Majesty; and therefore might justly admit a low Word into that Poem, which wou'd have disgraced his

Æneid; especially when a God was to be join'd with it in the Comparison.

As Antiquity thus conceals what is low and vulgar in an Author, so does it draw a Kind of Veil over any Expression that is strain'd above Nature, and recedes too much from the familiar Forms of Speech. A violent *Grecism*, that wou'd startle a *Roman* at the Reading of it, sounds more natural to us, and is less distinguishable from other Parts of the Stile. An obsolete, or a new Word that made a strange Appearance at first to the Reader's Eye, is now incorporated into the Tongue, and grown of a Piece with the rest of the Language. And as for any bold Expressions in a celebrated Ancient, we are so far from disliking 'em, that most Readers single out only such Passages as are most daring to commend; and take it for granted, that the Stile is beautiful and elegant, where they find it hard and unnatural. Thus has Time mellowed the

Works of Antiquity, by qualifying, if I may
 so say, the Strength and Rawness of their
 Colours, and casting into Shades the Light
 that was at first too violent and glaring for
 the Eye to behold with Pleasure.

F I N I S.



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